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AUTHOR Huddleston, Barbara
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ABSTRACT

The idea that food should be a universally accepted human right has been the focus of worldwide attention aimed primarily at increasing production at the national level and on reducing price fluctuations in world markets. However, the problem of individual human needs must be simultaneously addressed. The largest number of hungry people live in low-income countries, especially Asia, whose people receive less than 90 percent of their national standards for adequate per capita caloric intake. Similarly, two-thirds of the sub-Saharan African population and a substantial proportion of Latin American and Middle Eastern peoples may also be consuming less than their national caloric standard. Migration further intensifies the problem by leading people threatened by famine to join the ranks of the chronically poor and malnourished in urban areas. Lack of food is not the only cause of malnutrition, with viral diseases resulting from parasite-infested drinking water causing an additional 20,000 malnutrition-related deaths per day among children under five years of age. Policies aimed toward solving the problem include the provision of increased food security guarantees; aid to agriculture; technical assistance for food policy planning; more effective balancing of urban and rural food subsidies; and direct health and nutrition intervention that simultaneously addresses immediate needs for food, clean water, and health care as well as the need for employment. Such resource transfers, technical assistance, and targeted food distributions require genuine cooperation among developed nations. (LH)

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Confronting World Hunger

by Barbara Huddleston

Since the 1974 World Food Conference called worldwide attention to the seriousness and global reach of hunger and food-related problems, many countries have taken steps, both together and separately, to improve world food security. The focus of these governmental actions has been primarily on increasing production at the national level and on reducing price fluctuations in world markets. While such measures are important to overcoming food insecurity, they do not directly address the problem of *individual* human need. Providing food security for the individual means guaranteeing for every child, woman, and man the right to freedom from hunger.

WORLD BANK—Ray Witlin

Locally grown cereal harvests like this rice crop in Senegal are still the principal source of supply for meeting basic food needs in most parts of the world.

The Right to Food

On a limited scale, the idea of a right to food is probably as old as human history. In ancient Israel, the right to glean—to gather the grain left behind after harvesting—was granted to widows and young children with no other means of subsistence. In medieval Europe, a traveler could always find a bowl of food in the kitchen of a local lord. In many parts of Africa and Asia, social custom still dictates that every relative knocking at the door, whether invited or not, be offered food.

Yet in all such cases, the responsibility to help acknowledged by society, families, or individuals has applied to relatively small numbers of people whose needs could be sustained by the resources of the household or community. Where poverty and hunger exist on a larger scale, society does not always recognize an obligation to provide money or food in the amounts required to eliminate hunger. Cultural mores in most parts of the world include offering charity to the poor. But charitable actions do not guarantee a *right*. When a beggar holds out his hand in the streets of Calcutta—or any other major city—he can only hope for, not expect, a charitable response. Indeed, in Bengali, the

Barbara Huddleston is a Research Fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. She has worked on food security and food aid issues since joining IFPRI in 1976. Her current projects include coordination of a major evaluation of Food-for-Work in Bangladesh and development of criteria [illegible] to better meet humanitarian and developmental objectives. She contributed to the report of the U.S. Presidential Commission on World Hunger in 1979 and has served as consultant on food policy issues for the United Nations World Food Council and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others. She is former director of the Trade Negotiations Division of the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and has served as economic analyst for Africa in the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful contributions of her colleagues Shubh Kumar and Stephen Haykin to this paper.

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language of Calcutta, the expression for famine is "the time when charity stops."

The idea that food should be a universally assured human right gained credence in the early part of this century, when the root cause of hunger was identified as poverty—a poverty whose harshness and dehumanization had been aggravated by the twin processes of industrialization and urbanization. Although the right to food was explicitly mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, this statement was not backed up by a political commitment or an institutional framework within which the right could be guaranteed. Only within the past decade has there been a growing consensus that the international community has an obligation to respond to genuine food emergencies arising out of political strife and natural disaster, and that affected persons and groups can claim their right to food in such circumstances. In the United States, Congress passed a resolution affirming this right in 1975. Even this limited degree of international consensus does not, however, extend to situations in which hunger is an ongoing, chronic condition rather than a temporary event.

One reason for the reluctance to make a stronger commitment to combatting chronic hunger is the perception that the economic cost of living up to such a commitment would be very high, and that the world simply cannot afford it. Yet many countries currently spend much larger amounts for armaments and other high-technology investments. Moreover, in some societies, the benefits from economic growth flow to and are retained by a relatively small number of people, limiting the resources available to finance programs that would meet the basic needs of the majority. Some redistribution of resources among and within countries is therefore possible, even if politically difficult. The only caveat is that the commitment of a country's resources to current consumption cannot be so large that the economic base for future growth and prosperity is jeopardized. Finding the proper balance between satisfying immediate human needs and building economic and political systems in which individuals can in the future acquire the means to satisfy their own requirements is the central ethical and political issue facing those engaged in the fight against hunger today.

Locating the Hungry

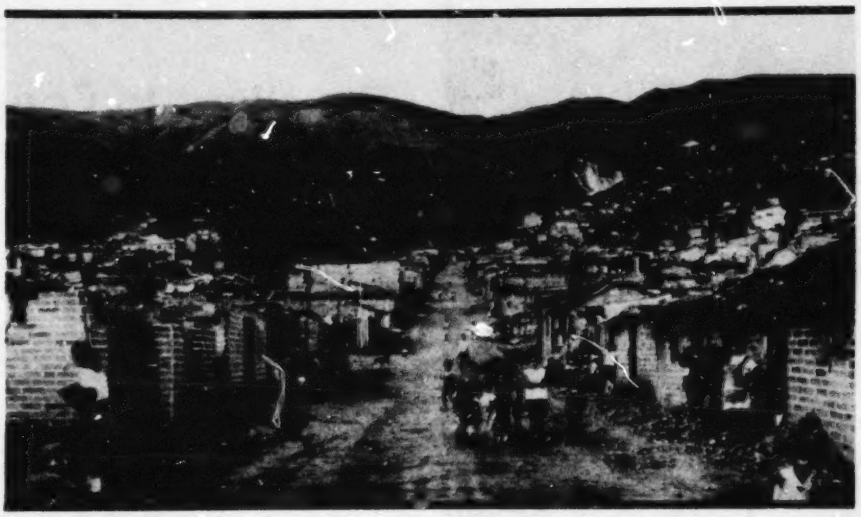
In general, hunger is concentrated where incomes are low. In 1980, per capita food supplies were less than adequate in 53 developing countries. Of these, more than half were the predominantly rural, low-income countries of South Asia, China, and Sub-Saharan Africa, with average annual per capita incomes of less than $410. Some higher-income countries in Latin America and the North Africa/Middle East region—countries where levels of urbanization and urban employment are high—also have inadequate per capita food supplies.

Within both groups of countries, it is usually the poor who are truly hungry. Broadly speaking, there are three categories of the hungry: the destitute, persons in temporary distress, and families of unemployed or underemployed landless laborers. The first category includes individuals—women, the elderly, orphans, the handicapped—without visible means of support from other family members and without marketable skills or employment opportunities in their local communities. Individuals temporarily affected by sudden disasters such as drought, flood, or political strife comprise a second category. Some recover, but others join the ranks of the chronically hungry—in villages, cities, or refugee camps.

In the third category are families in which the able-bodied men and sometimes the women are seeking but unable to find work. Many persons in the landless group do find day labor in agriculture, construction, or services. But population pressure in many countries is swelling the numbers of the landless poor without comparable increases in their employment opportunities. In rural areas, landless families may eke out an existence at levels of food consumption that are less than adequate to maintain the nutritional well-being of all family members. When the situation becomes desperate, the men often migrate alone to the cities in search of employment to provide for themselves and their families back home. If these migrants cannot find urban employment, they and the families they have left behind eventually may be forced into the destitute category. Increasingly the rural exodus also includes women heads of households leaving for the towns and cities, with their dependents, for the same reasons—and likewise risking destitution.

Pockets of hungry people may be found in any country of the world, but in countries where the overall living standard is high, the means to address the problem should be available within the country itself. For the poor in low-income and middle-income countries, the international community must for the time being bear part of the responsibility if their needs are to be met.

What does it mean, in measurable terms, to be hungry and malnourished? In each of the world's low-income countries, an internationally applied standard for adequate per capita caloric intake is fixed on the basis of the physical characteristics



WORLD BANK—Edwin G. Huffman

Malnutrition is among the serious problems that confront migrants from the rural areas who cannot find work in the cities (above: periphery of the city of Medellin, Colombia)

and activity levels of that country's population. On average, this is a daily diet of 2,200 to 2,400 calories per capita, including 30 grams of protein. This may seem high to someone whose way of life and work is sedentary and who is struggling against overweight on a maintenance diet of 1,500-1,800 calories per day. But anyone performing hard manual work—whether an agricultural laborer in the Sahel region of western Africa, a construction worker in the United States, or a rickshaw puller in Bangladesh—needs more than 3,000 calories a day in order to perform work necessary for the family's support. Within a family, individual requirements differ from one member to another, depending on factors such as age, sex, and activity level. These differences are taken into account, however, in the figure of 2,200-2,400 calories established separately for each country as its standard for adequate consumption.

Consuming less than the individual requirement produces the feeling of hunger, and malnourishment results when hunger is severe or persists over a prolonged period. Use of a national per capita average for the caloric standard which differentiates between adequate and inadequate nutritional status is not ideal, but it is the best measure available. When paired with low per capita income, it helps identify the countries where hunger and malnutrition are most serious.

Asia

By far the largest number of hungry people live in Asia. In 1977-79, five low-income countries—India, China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal—all achieved less than 90 per cent of their national standards for adequate per capita caloric intake. In this group of countries, which contain 1.5 billion people, or half of the developing world's population, average per capita consumption amounted to less than 2,100 calories per day. Recent data are not available for Kampuchea, Laos, and Vietnam, but given the disruption that years of war have created throughout that region, it is very likely that average per capita caloric intake for their 66 million people is also inadequate. As of 1980, Sri Lanka and Pakistan were the only low-income Asian countries with a nearly adequate food supply in per capita terms.

By some estimates, nearly two thirds of the 2.2 billion people living in Asia appeared to be consuming less than an adequate amount in 1980, and nearly half appeared to fall below 90 per cent of this caloric requirement. Recently these high estimates of the numbers of malnourished in Asia have been challenged. It has been suggested that, in the case of India, for example, the number of the seriously malnourished may be no more than 15-25 per cent of the population if account is taken of various factors such as the body's capacity to adjust to variation in the daily amount of food consumed, or differentiation between those consuming a few calories less than the norm and those consuming far less than that.

USAID—David L. Rhoad

Drought refugees at a relief camp in Ethiopia. Beyond immediate aid, such refugees need help in resuming agricultural or other work to feed and support themselves.

These lower estimates, if valid, do not diminish the seriousness of the hunger problem in India or elsewhere. What they do suggest is that seriously malnourished groups are more concentrated and more difficult to locate. To policymakers and program planners, this means that finding the hungry people may be more difficult than was previously thought. In Asia, for example, the revised estimates encourage reexamination of the assumption that hunger is predominantly rural. Since those who seek to escape rural poverty by migrating to larger towns and cities often cannot find the employment they seek, they may be even more destitute and hungry in their new environment than those remaining in the rural areas.

Africa

As in Asia, the population of Africa is still 80 per cent rural, despite high rates of migration to the cities. Commonly used estimates indicate that as many as two thirds of the population may be consuming less than the national caloric standard, although for the region as a whole, some estimates indicate that sufficient food has been available in recent years to provide an adequate level of per capita caloric intake. National nutrition surveys conducted in five low-income countries located in the drought-ridden Sahel region of west Africa show that, in the rural areas, over 5 per cent of the children under six years of age weigh less than 80 per cent of the standard for their height. In these same countries, life expectancy at birth is just 41 years. In contrast, surveys of other African countries with higher per capita income levels show lower percentages of young children seriously below the standard weight-for-height and higher life expectancies at birth. Thus in Africa, the hunger problem appears to be predominantly rural and, as in Asia, concentrated in low-income countries.

Latin America and the Middle East

Although in Latin America and North Africa/Middle East only three countries (Haiti, Afghanistan, Sudan) fall into the low-income category, a substantial proportion of the population in middle- and high-income countries nevertheless is probably malnourished. Available data indicate that the caloric intake of nearly 50 per cent of the population in these two regions is less than adequate, and about a third falls below 90 per cent of the adequate amount. The questions raised about such high estimates in the discussion of Asia and Africa above also apply to the figures for Latin America and North Africa/Middle East. However,

because these two regions are more urbanized (65 per cent in Latin America and 45 per cent in North Africa/Middle East), urban malnutrition looms larger here than in Asia or Africa. In parts of Latin America and the North Africa/Middle East region, landlessness is widespread, and the unemployment rate is at least 20 per cent by official estimates.

Second- and third-generation migrants from rural areas who inhabit urban slums face a panoply of adverse environmental conditions. They lack clean water and good sanitation facilities, medical care, and education, as well as adequate food. What draws migrants to urban areas in all regions is not only the "push" factor of often grim rural economic conditions, but also the "pull" factor of the hope of cash wages and a better and more interesting life in the city—if only a city job can be found. While many do succeed, many others continue in the ranks of the chronically poor and chronically malnourished. As the prominent economist Raúl Prebisch has stated the problem, "the migrants from the rural areas who ceaselessly pour into the bigger towns merely shift the scene of their redundancy." Their situation can be improved in the long run only by a more vigorous, equitable, and balanced approach to rural and urban development.

CARE

Infant suffering from malnutrition is treated in a hospital in Chile.

The Geography of Hunger

Adequacy of national food supply in terms of national consumption r

1976-78	Latin America:	Sub-Saharan Africa:	North Af Middle E
Total population (millions)	337.2	304.7	241.0
Rural population (millions)	118.0	243.8	132.6
Low-income population (millions)	77.6	188.9	81.9
Average per capita caloric consumption as percentage of national standard	105.5%	91.5%	101.5%

Sources: Barbara Huddleston, *Closing the Cereals Gap with Trade and Food Aid*, IFPRI, forthcoming, and Shlomo Reutlinger and Marcelo Se

Visible and Invisible Hunger

The most frequent and disturbing image of the world hunger problem is that of the child with shriveled limbs and a bloated belly, crying from hunger because its family lives in an area suddenly stricken with drought, flood, or political unrest, and there is no longer enough food to go around. Equally common, if less frequently seen in the morning paper or on the evening news, is the elderly man or woman who, weakened by lack of food during a time of famine, succumbs to infectious diseases or the failure of vital organs. If the famine is short-term, perhaps lasting only one or two months between the time the food runs out and the time a new harvest can be brought in, many of those affected can recover. But if drought or war persists, death from starvation is inevitable unless an alternate means of subsistence can be found.

A common response of those whose lives are threatened by famine is migration. This was the case with the nomads of the Sahel in 1972 and 1973, with the landless laborers of rural Bangladesh in 1974-75, and with the Kampuchean refugees in 1979. It is the case today with the movement of Ethiopian people across the borders of Somalia and Sudan in response to political tensions and drought. Without doubt, lack of food has had devastating effects for many individuals among these groups.

In situations of famine, many people first react by consuming their supply of seeds for the next year's crop or by selling their assets and using the cash to buy food. As the cash begins to run out, family members consume less food each day, with detrimental effects on their ability to sustain their normal levels of work activity. Some then turn to begging or to petty trade to eke out an existence. Others scavenge for edible roots and berries, leaves, and even the bark of trees that grow in the wild, or turn to trapping small birds, animals, and insects in their attempt to sustain life. If rains eventually come—or if the fighting stops—settled

equirements

Seriously Inadequate

(average consumption per person less than 90% of national standard)

Category includes following low-income† countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Chad, China-People's Rep., Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, India, Maldives, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, São Tomé and Principe, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Upper Volta

Inadequate

(average consumption per person 90–97% of national standard)

Category includes following low-income† countries: Benin, Burundi, Central African Rep., Comoros, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Zaire

Nearly Adequate

(average consumption per person 98–99% of national standard)

Category includes following low-income† countries: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan

Adequate

(average consumption per person 100% of national standard or higher)

Category includes following low-income† countries: Burma, Cape Verde, Madagascar

Data not available

†Average income per person of less than $410 yearly in 1980.

rica/ast:	Asia:
	2,034.9
	1,648.3
	1,262.0
	93.6%

owsky, *Malnutrition and Poverty*, World Bank Staff Occasional Paper No. 2

agriculture gradually can be resumed. But by then those who sold their assets or migrated may have lost access to land, tools, animals, and seeds. For them, there will be a *continuing* food problem until they can reestablish themselves in some other location or form of employment that provides an income adequate to supply their basic food and other needs. Thus many who were originally the victims of famine eventually join the ranks of the chronically poor and malnourished.

Experts have been slow to arrive at a precise definition of chronic malnutrition. At first, nutritionists used measurements relating weight and age in young children as an indicator of malnutrition. Malnutrition was defined as present whenever this "anthropometric" measurement fell below 90 per cent of the standard even if the other physical signs of distress or reduction in activity level were not present. Recently, a more complex standard, comprised of both height-for-age and weight-for-height, has come into use. When height-for-age is low, physical growth has been stunted, indicating chronic malnutrition. When weight-for-height is low, the body is beginning to waste away, indicating a temporary shortage of food and/or the presence of other factors which prevent weight gain or cause weight loss. Where stunting or wasting is found in young children, it is presumed that the entire household's food supply is inadequate and that at least some family members are suffering from hunger.

Severe malnutrition—caused by caloric or protein deficiency, or both—affects about 1-3 per cent of the preschool population in developing countries. In their extreme forms, these deficiencies may lead to the conditions known as kwashiorkor and marasmus. Kwashiorkor most commonly occurs in children one to three years of age who have been weaned from the breast by a starchy diet consisting primarily of bananas, yams, or cassava. The lack of protein in such a diet disrupts normal bodily functions and brings on the familiar symptoms of fluid retention, bloating, and skin and hair abnormalities. Because starchy foods are staples in the diet of many parts of Africa, kwashiorkor is particularly widespread there. Marasmus, which occurs primarily in even younger children, is caused not by a lack of protein, but by a lack or improper utilization of calories. Children suffering from marasmus are thin, undersized, and seriously underweight.

Mild or moderate malnutrition is a less conspicuous but perhaps more pernicious aspect of the world food problem. Estimates of the number of malnourished vary, but even taking the most optimistic, at least 500 million people (double the population of the United States) probably need some supplementary food each day to bring their total intake up to an adequate level. Among the chronically malnourished, the groups which are particularly vulnerable include pregnant and nursing women and young children. The caloric and protein requirements of these groups are particularly high, yet they are frequently discriminated against when scarce food supplies are distributed within the household.

While the milder forms of protein-caloric deficiency are not so visible, if prolonged, they may stunt physical growth in young children and lead to lower activity levels—which in turn slow mental development and lower productivity. Susceptibility to disease is also greater when nutritional status is inadequate.

Lack of food is not the only cause of malnourishment. Viral diseases accompanied by high fever can cause wasting and prevent the body from using food to maintain weight and strength. In many parts of the world, drinking water is the carrier of parasites that result in diarrhea and dehydration, which are estimated to cause some 20,000 deaths each day among children under 5 years of age. The main preventive strategy is of course the provision of clean water. Where clean water is not available and diarrhea from water parasites is still a major problem, such deaths can be prevented by oral feeding of a cheap and simply prepared salt and sugar solution. Where water itself is lacking, increasing its supply is critical, since the lack of water harms the condition of body tissue and can eventually cause death.

Policies That Can Help

Given the complexity of the food problem and its close connection with other pressing problems of development, what can be done? Skeptics charge there is little that outsiders can do—that external interventions often do more harm than good, and that the responsibility for turning the situation around really rests upon local and national political action by individuals and groups most directly affected by adverse economic and social conditions that result in poverty and hunger.

Nevertheless, many knowledgeable individuals still believe that action by the international community is both possible and necessary to a serious worldwide effort to confront and conquer the hunger problem in this century. Since the world food crisis of 1972-74 greatly increased worldwide awareness of the nature and seriousness of hunger and its causes, there has been action on several fronts.

At the international level, developed countries have responded by raising the minimum level of food aid that they guarantee to provide when supplies are scarce and by creating a financing facility for cereal imports under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund. Moreover, the food and agriculture sector is now receiving a higher priority than before in the allocation of international development assistance. Since 1973, foreign aid to agriculture has doubled in real value, and its share of official total foreign aid has risen from 20 per cent to nearly 30 per cent—with about a quarter of the total channeled through internationally managed agencies. Low-income countries are receiving a larger share of food aid, and more attention is being paid to the effects of both general food subsidies and targeted nutrition programs on future agricultural output.

Over the same decade, planning to meet both the food needs of low-income consumers and the income needs of staple-crop producers has risen to the forefront of attention. At the national level, more than 40 developing countries have requested assistance for the preparation of food-sector strategies from the World Food Council. (The Council is a U.N. agency established in 1975 and comprised of the ministers of agriculture of the Council's 36 member states. It meets annually to set policy directions and to facilitate aid flows for international and national efforts to combat hunger.) National food strategies integrate investment planning for agricultural development with policy planning that seeks both to provide more market incentives to farmers and to reduce instability of prices and supplies for consumers.

FAO—F Botts

WORLD BANK—Kay Muldoon

Increases in productivity made possible by use of improved crop varieties (top: monitoring corn crop in Peru) and by expansion of the irrigated area (above: irrigating wheat in Pakistan) provide the best hope for alleviating hunger.

The actions initiated during the last decade—food security guarantees, higher levels of aid to agriculture, technical assistance for food policy planning—all illustrate practical measures that the international community can take collectively to guarantee the right to food for the world's poor. However, because the geography of hunger and its causes differ from region to region, national policy responses and outside assistance both must take into account specific local problems, needs, and practices.

In Asia, for example, a 1 per cent increase in prices in India can sometimes mean as much as a 10 per cent loss in consumption for low-income families that rely on urban markets for their food. Thus the emphasis that the Indian government places on prices in urban markets appears to be an appropriate policy approach. At the same time, however, increasing the supply of donated food, distributed through mother-child feeding centers or food-for-work programs in rural areas, can provide direct temporary relief to the landless poor—thereby gaining time for national development efforts to generate employment opportunities and higher levels of per capita income in needy localities.

In Africa, many countries pursue price and marketing policies deliberately intended to alleviate food problems in urban areas. These policies may have positive nutritional consequences, but food subsidies in urban areas also may have the undesired effect of attracting more urban migration as food conditions worsen in rural areas. The movement of people toward a cheap source of food may help to solve their problems temporarily, but in the long run the hunger problem in Africa will be aggravated if this trend continues. The resulting increase in migration may simply cancel out the benefits of the food subsidy program. Urban food subsidies need to be more effectively balanced with increased investment in improving agricultural productivity and in creating a production base from which both rural and urban consumers can be supplied in the future.

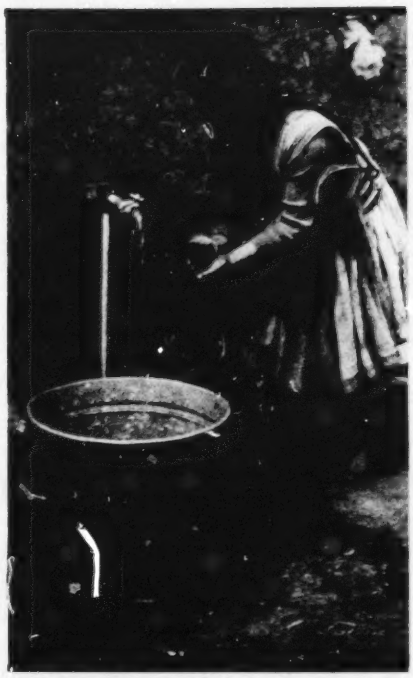
Where rapid urbanization has been accompanied by rapid industrialization, high rates of labor absorption, and the growth of export-oriented industries—as in some now middle-income countries of Asia and Latin America—the food problem has been effectively managed at the national level with food imports. This has been possible because the process of eco-

nomic growth has generated more purchasing power among working people and provided the foreign exchange necessary to pay for commercial imports. But in Africa and parts of Latin America—where migration is prompted by adverse economic conditions in rural areas without sufficiently rapid increases in industrial employment and other income-generating opportunities—those who need more food often do not have the wherewithal to obtain it. Thus their food problem can only intensify.

Recent studies on the food problems of Latin America have shown that for groups at the same level of income, dietary intake tends to be lower in urban than in rural households. Furthermore, since the population in this region is more concentrated in urban areas, and since employment is scarce, these households have little prospect of fully meeting their food needs, either through their own production or through market purchases, even if prices are kept artificially low. For these urban groups, direct health and nutrition interventions that simultaneously address their *immediate* needs for food, clean water, and health care and their equally urgent if slightly more *long-term* need for employment can make an important positive difference.

At the national level, long-run economic development that provides adequate income to all segments of a country's population is the best means to combat hunger. More income security also reduces incentives for having many children, which couples view as providing an additional means of family support where per capita income is low.

The contribution of the international community must remain what it always has been—the transfer of resources and the provision of technical assistance. *Resource transfers* may be in the form of either cash or commodities. While support for large-scale development projects or research and extension projects must come in the form of cash, there is also a role for food aid as a complementary resource transfer, if it is provided within the context of an overall food plan for a particular country. *Technical assistance* is needed at two levels: for research and analysis and for managing development projects. Many countries still lack sufficient numbers of trained personnel to use additional cash or commodity resources effectively for these purposes.



CARE

Clean water is provided at a CARE project in Peru.

FAO—S Bustang

Children are fed soya bean milk at a nutrition institute in Indonesia

At the individual level, programs which distribute food directly to those who are genuinely hungry continue to be desperately needed. *Targeted food distribution programs* are an essential vehicle to meet this need. Because of the clear link between poverty and malnutrition, it is often assumed that providing more food will mean an equivalent increase in caloric intake within a poor household, and that this will be reflected by increased consumption among preschool children and noticeable improvement in their nutritional status as measured anthropometrically. But when supplementary food is provided, this does not always result in commensurate increases in food consumption within low-income households. This is because the food is treated as if it were additional income, and a portion of it is redirected to other uses.

These uses may include meeting basic needs other than food, such as improved shelter, or medical services, or school fees. When malnutrition is not severe, or goes unrecognized for lack of knowledge, households may also prefer to substitute the food supplement for their traditional staple and allocate the cash resources that are thus released for improving the quality, variety, or taste of the diet rather than for increasing the amount of calories consumed. Sometimes part of the cash freed up by food distribution is spent for consumption goods that satisfy the desire for entertainment and immediate pleasure, with little if any lasting effect on family welfare.

Traditional food distribution practices within the household also may result in nutritional inequity within the family. In many cultures, custom gives adult males preference in intra-household food distribution—for reasons both related and totally unrelated to their productivity responsibilities to the family. Such practices inevitably discriminate against women and children, both when food is scarce and when additional food becomes available. Sometimes older children are discriminated against as new children are born; in other settings, older working children receive more and younger children must make do with less. Finally, women themselves often reduce their own intake in order to provide more for their families—for children, husbands, the elderly—when supplies are scarce.

For all of these reasons, improvement in consumption resulting from food supplementation programs may be less than expected, and these programs may not always produce measurable changes in the nutritional status of target groups. Nevertheless, field studies show that targeted food distribution programs usually do have some positive effect on consumption. Since many of the milder forms of malnutrition are not easily measured, the consumption increases may not

always show up as statistically significant improvements in nutritional status. Unless there is positive evidence to the contrary, however, the increases in consumption resulting from a food distribution program probably are beneficial, even where significant nutritional improvement is not observed. Expenditures of additional family income for purposes other than caloric intake can be an equally important benefit of food distribution programs when these expenditures are used to meet other basic needs.

Food supplements have a more noticeable effect on nutritional status when the increase is sufficient to make up the family's total caloric deficiency. The effect is also more evident when the initial condition is clearly below an acceptable level of food consumption for the recipient individual or household. Thus greater benefit can be obtained from directing food distribution programs more specifically to groups with seriously inadequate levels of food consumption, rather than targeting broadly on low-income groups, as has often been done in the past.

The positive effect of increases in the quantity of food consumed on nutrition and well-being would be even greater if it were possible to control the many parasitic and viral infections that are prevalent in poor countries. The world's health and food problems are closely interrelated. Along with adequate supplies of food, the provision of clean water, immunization and other primary health care programs, and health and nutrition education all can make important contributions to nutritional status.

The mode for providing any kind of food assistance in the future must be one of genuine cooperation. Many individuals in the developing world have a clear perception of the nature of the problem and have put food needs at the top of the political agenda in their countries. Too often, prescriptions are offered by outsiders from the West without taking sufficient account of the insights and judgments of nationals of the developing world.

Millions who are now hungry can enjoy their right to food in this century. But this will only be possible if new initiatives are undertaken as a true collaboration between donors and recipients and if they are focused on eradicating the situations that give rise to hunger as well as on meeting immediate needs.

Selected Reading:

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